

The Importance of Environmental Monitoring and Analysis

By Jim Simmonds Supervisor King County Science and Technical Support section



King County has tested for water pollution and monitored environmental health for over 40 years. Having good data describing the quality of our local environment is important to the long-term sustainability of King County's natural resources.

Starting in the 1950s with concerns about sewage impacts on Lake Washington, there has been a high level of interest throughout the region in ensuring that our collective actions don't harm the environment to unacceptable levels. The data collected on Lake Washington water quality half a century ago spurred the creation of the regional wastewater system now owned and operated by King County.

Today, the recovery of Lake Washington following diversion of the sewage flows is studied in university classes worldwide as an example of how urban areas and natural environments can coexist.

It is comforting to know that the visionary actions of our predecessors eliminated the environmental harm caused by the daily discharge of millions of gallons of sewage into Lake Washington. However, King County's environment is now facing other threats and challenges related to population growth, urban sprawl, invasive species, climate change, stormwater runoff, and habitat destruction.

Routinely collected scientific data about environmental quality can help provide an early warning should any unacceptable environmental impacts loom in our future.

What is happening now?

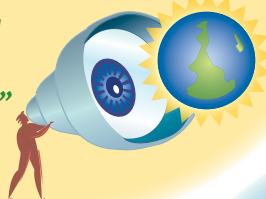
The King County Science and Technical Support Section, in collaboration with the King County Environmental Laboratory, continue testing water quality in our region's lakes, streams, rivers, estuaries and Puget Sound. We also support collecting data necessary for implementing salmon recovery plans, and track the amount of water flowing in the county's many rivers and streams.

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The Science Section Vision Statement

A vision statement focuses on the future by answering the question, "Where do you want to go?," and by defining the ultimate result of an organization's work. It should serve as an inspiration to those who work within an organization and provide the framework for strategic planning. The Section vision statement is:

"Healthy and sustainable ecosystems."



The Science Section Mission Statement

A mission statement focuses on the present and is a brief description of an organization's purpose. It answers the question, "Why do we exist?" and articulates the organization's purpose both for those internal and external to the organization. The Section's mission statement meets that definition and reads as follows:

"To provide scientific knowledge, information and analysis in support of regional environmental resource management."



New initiatives we hope to implement in the coming years include:

- Gathering data on the impacts of climate change on King County infrastructure and programs to allow for wise expenditure of funds and to allow adaptation to future changes at minimal cost;
- Gathering flow, habitat, and biology data necessary to design, permit, build, and assess the many levee and other construction projects called for in the King County Flood Hazard Management Plan;
- Gathering stormwater runoff quality data needed to ensure that future stormwater treatment approaches and technologies safeguard our water quality;
- Gathering biological and ecological data necessary to understand biodiversity within King County, and how it is changing over time; and to identify techniques and approaches needed to manage and protect multiple species and their habitats.

Quality of life is routinely rated as being of high importance by many residents in the Puget Sound region. Protecting our natural environment from unacceptable harm is an important component of maintaining our quality of life. The scientific testing done by the King County Science and Technical Support Section and the King County Environmental Laboratory is a key component in ensuring this protection lasts for future generations.

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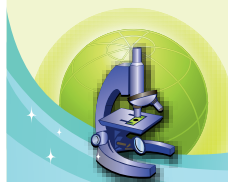
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